

[By Julian Pecquet](#)

Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.) is co-sponsoring legislation requiring the Medicare to negotiate prescription drug prices, a priority for House Democrats in the ongoing debt-ceiling negotiations.

The bill, cosponsored by Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.), could save up to \$156 billion over 10 years according to its proponents, but it's vehemently opposed by the pharmaceutical industry. The provision was in the House-passed healthcare reform bill but didn't make it into the final bill.

"The ability to negotiate the cost to taxpayers of prescription drugs purchased through the Medicare program could be a substantial savings at a critical moment," Emerson said in a statement. "Before we ever trim benefits to senior citizens, we must consider the efficiency of the programs that serve them. We have a duty to the taxpayer to get the best bang for the buck, especially on costly pharmaceuticals for which the federal government facilitates purchases in such large quantities."

The industry group Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America says the legislation will lead to rationing.

Emerson signed on to similar legislation last year. The issue is even more partisan this year, however, as House Democrats have endorsed the provision as an alternative to the GOP's plan to cut Medicare spending by shifting to subsidies for private insurance.

"There's savings to be had by negotiating those drug prices and addressing how Medicare reimbursement takes place for drug benefits," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said last month. "This is a rip-off of the taxpayer, to have the pharmaceutical companies make as much money as they do."